

## Get rid of 'dis' syndrome

Dato' Dzulkifli Abd Razak

Article

The New Sunday Times - 12/24/2006

In a season that encourages giving and sharing, it is rather disappointing to read a comment by the chairperson of the Disabled Persons' Integrated Family Services saying companies are "not interested" in hiring disabled persons (*orang kurang upaya*).

It has resulted in 80 per cent of them being without jobs. The others are either self-employed or forced to accept low-paying jobs.

This is despite the suggestion that one per cent of the workforce in every company be made up of the disabled. Up to 100,000 of them have to rely on aid from the Welfare Department. The situation is described as "alarming". So much for Malaysians with a big heart!

"Dis" has caused much discomfort to many, no matter how "normal" one looks or behaves.

It is the same for people with HIV/AIDS, or ex-addicts, in terms of employment. The response is bound to be the same, if not worse in some cases.

Compared to some of the so-called "disabled" persons who can paint beautifully with their feet, or play musical instruments, the "normal" mortals are no less "dis-abled" themselves.

In total darkness, everyone except for the "blind" is disabled. So who are we to judge others and on what basis?

All the definitions that blind us to our misperceptions and prejudices are, after all, our own making.

Unless we have the courage to change them, it would be that more difficult to expect any kind of changes in the foreseeable future, particularly when it is ingrained in the mind.

It is unfortunate that even the highest authorities are quite happy to call so-and-so a disabled person without any qualms, as though they belong to a different category of people.

The first step, therefore, is to get rid from our minds the "dis" syndrome and give disabled persons a more positive and accurate outlook. One suggestion is to understand disabled persons as *orang kelainan upaya* or "differently-abled" persons. And that their different abilities be put to good use.

Of course, for the less caring, profit-obsessed companies, the question of cost seems a formidable obstacle. But how different is this consideration when compared to having to put up a new information system to accommodate new computer wizards whom the company has hired?

Or a new office for a new talent acquired by the company?

In short, there are ways of working things out once the dis-information that has long played tricks on our minds is eliminated.

The reality is that there is only one category of humankind endowed with a variety of different abilities.

But this is not all. According to the Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development, most employers are still reluctant to set up childcare centres at the workplace. To date, there are only 26 private ones but more than five times that number in statutory bodies.

The overall poor response is rather disappointing, to say the least, despite the incentives and perks. As is often the case, cost and liabilities have been cited for not pursuing the option, but this hits at the very core of the broader issues of "human capital" development as envisaged in the Ninth Malaysia Plan.

There may be, of course, exceptions to the rule, where the workplace is perceived as dangerous and unfit for the child, but this is exactly what it is—exceptions.

The numbers are obviously in the minority and certainly do not reflect the low level of participation to date.

Just as in the case of the differently-abled persons, perhaps the ministry's parliamentary secretary is right in pointing out that it really depends on whether the employers have the "will" to make the initiative a successful one.

Corporate social responsibility envisages the integration of socio-economic concerns with environmental interests in business operations and the interaction with the community, as stakeholders—on a voluntary basis.

Gone are the days of *Minah Karan* (female factory workers) where society was saddled with many (mostly preventable) social problems, while the companies laughed all the way to the bank.

We need to learn from past experiences and mistakes and act more responsibly towards the community we operate and live in.

Moreover, recent corporate governance surveys reportedly indicate that there are ample opportunities for improvement for Malaysian companies in this area.

It is time to start shifting our mental paradigms about human capital development involving differently-abled persons and childcare at the workplace.

In his 2007 Budget speech, the prime minister emphasised and identified examples of good corporate social responsibility, including developing human capital through adopt-a-school programmes and supporting charitable organisations.

The CEO of Price waterhouseCoopers has said: "Our obligation as business leaders is to leave the world a better place than we found it."

*Wishing all Christian readers a joyous and Merry Christmas!*

[Terms & Conditions](#)